

Following is a draft letter from the City Neighborhood Council that CNC's budget committee asks the district councils to review for possible adoption by CNC. As the Mayor is actively putting together the two-year budget that he will present to the City Council in September, it is desirable for this CNC letter (and any budget letter that we urge that your own district consider sending to the Mayor) to be sent well before June 30 (the next CNC meeting date). While it is unlikely that the letter can be approved in full at CNC's May 19 meeting, it could be discussed and authorized then, but with the final text worked out and circulated in the following weeks, based on additional input from the district councils that are not meeting until after May 19. District council chairs or representatives are asked to provide input on the text of the letter and how and when it should be completed, to CNC Chair Chris Leman, cleman@oo.net; and CNC budget chair Ron Boddie, rjboddie_2@msn.com.

June xx, 2008

Mayor Greg Nickels
City Hall, 600 4th Avenue, 7th floor
PO Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

RE: 2009-10 BUDGET PROPOSALS

Dear Mayor Nickels:

Continuing in the advisory role assigned by City legislation to the City Neighborhood Council and the thirteen District Councils in development of the City budget, and based on an extensive process of consultation with and among the district councils, CNC offers the following suggestions as you develop budget proposals for 2009-10.

Austerity requires early warning of possible cuts, and better use of existing funds. With the City's projected revenues declining, we realize that program increases will be more difficult to achieve than in recent years, and that some cuts will be needed. Please ensure early warning about any possible cuts, so that those affected have adequate notice and the opportunity to comment. Also, in a situation of financial austerity, it is important to pursue policy and management improvements in every department that can produce better results for the taxpayers' money.

Public Safety. We support continuing efforts to increase the number of sworn Seattle Police Department uniformed positions. Increases must be on a net basis, thus taking attrition into account. Uniformed police and fire efforts will go furthest if the City restores full funding of the Crime Prevention Coordinators and their administrative support to re-establish and strengthen voluntary block watch and emergency preparedness efforts.

Health, Human Services, and Housing Recent years' cuts in the City's health, housing, and human services have hurt the most vulnerable, and we oppose reductions in these funds. Funding

should ensure that subsidized housing and related services are not unduly concentrated in any particular area of the city. A stable funding source for senior centers should be established.

Neighborhood Matching Fund. Even in the current austerity climate, we urge an increase in the Neighborhood Matching Fund, which has not fully recovered from the cuts of several years ago. The Neighborhood Matching Fund helps keep Seattle's neighborhoods livable, and by leveraging private dollars and volunteer hours, it brings double value to the City.

Neighborhood Service Centers and Neighborhood District Coordinators. Throughout the city, the Neighborhood Service Centers and the Neighborhood District Coordinators are essential resources for empowering residents, businesses, and the district councils. CNC strongly believes that the funds for these offices and positions should be retained and, where possible, increased.

Neighborhood Planning. We request the continued option for direct City assistance to grassroots groups to conduct neighborhood planning and stewardship efforts. Neighborhood planning and stewardship groups that wish to should continue to be able to hire consultants and do outreach under City contract and with City funds. Doing so empowers the community, and the plans that result are better, more widely supported, and more cost-effective than if these functions are performed exclusively by City employees and City-hired consultants.

Drainage and sewage infrastructure. Dangerous situations facing people in their homes and businesses require greater City investment in drainage and sewage networks. The design and implementation of Seattle Public Utilities construction projects has sometimes suffered from inadequate notice to or involvement of the affected communities. SPU's outreach efforts in planning the current Madison Valley drainage improvements are an excellent model that should be applied in its other projects, large or small.

Street condition and maintenance. The budgets and work plans for carrying out the Bridging the Gap transportation levy include no funding for non-arterial street maintenance, contrary to the recommendations of the City Neighborhood Council and SDOT's Citizen Technical Advisory Committee II. According to the figures that the City Council received from SDOT in 2006, non-arterial streets represent 42 percent of the maintenance backlog, or \$342 million. Neighborhoods and commercial and industrial areas cannot tolerate continued deterioration of these non-arterial streets. CNC again requests that the budget include funds specifically for evaluating and rebuilding non-arterial streets.

Arterial streets and bridges, too, will not benefit as much as they should from the current restoration unless damage is reduced from vehicles that are heavier than the state standard of 20,000 pounds per axle. The only vehicles normally allowed to exceed that limit are solid waste trucks and transit buses. CNC reiterates its 2007 recommendation that the waste disposal contract include incentives to discourage City haulers from using a state exemption that allows their trucks to exceed that weight. The City should also work to ensure that new King County Metro buses do not substantially exceed that weight, and that the City receives reimbursement for the damage that overweight uses do to its roads and bridges.

Parks acquisition, improvement and maintenance. Please fully restore parks maintenance funding, urban forestry, community center staffing, and youth programming to the higher levels that they enjoyed before the cuts of several years ago.

Library. Please continue into the future the recently increased hours when libraries are open, and the increased book-buying budget.

Economic development. While promotion of large and “small” (up to 500 employees!) businesses has its place, these businesses cause more displacement of existing homes and businesses than “micro businesses” that fit better into the urban fabric. Seattle’s economic development efforts should do more to protect and promote micro businesses.

Central call center for service requests. The proposed central call center should not close off existing channels by which members of the public are now successfully communicating with departmental staff. It would not be a step forward in public access to remove the many phone numbers of City offices that are now listed in directories, or to discourage City employees from responding directly to members of the public who contact them with service requests.

Translation and interpretation services. The City offers translation assistance for neighborhood organizations to send meeting announcements to non-English speakers. However, once non-English speakers arrive at a meeting, interpretation services are also needed in order for them to participate. Interpreters can be less expensive than written translators. City funds should be available for communities to request interpretation during meetings, and the City should also be able to respond with contact information of individuals who, as volunteers or on a low-cost basis, can provide interpretation in different languages. .

Video access to boards and commissions. Seattle Channel coverage of City boards and commissions has declined in recent years. Improved infrastructure would make it easier to broadcast or webcast more of these meetings. Cameras, microphones, laptops, portable audio mixers, or other equipment are needed for loan to boards and commissions whose staff or volunteers can operate them for webcasts. Also, electronics and wiring are needed to connect the Seattle Channel studio for live or recorded coverage of meetings held in the 40th floor meeting rooms of Municipal Tower and in the Board Room of Parks Department headquarters. None of this expense would come out of taxes, as the City receives cable franchise fees that should be spent on improving public access to government.

“Paper Cuts” program. In the laudable effort to reduce paper consumption, outreach efforts to the public have suffered, disadvantaging those who do not get notices by e-mail or the web. The proper goal of the Paper Cuts program is not to eliminate the City government’s use of paper, but to eliminate unnecessary use of paper and thereby make it easier to continue the uses of paper that are necessary, such as to sustain democracy. Posters and fliers advertising public meetings, and handouts at these meetings, are essential, and should be restored from recent cutbacks.

Conclusion. Thanks for your consideration of the above recommendations. This letter was distributed in draft for comment and revision from the district councils and authorized at the xxxx, 2008 City Neighborhood Council meeting.

Sincerely,

CNC Chair

CNC Budget Committee Chair

cc: District Councils
City Councilmembers